

**"The *Ge* is in the Church" and
"Our Parents are Playing Muslim":
Performance, Identity, and Resistance
among the Dan in Postcolonial Côte
d'Ivoire**

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In this article I examine the notion of resistance as it relates to the performance of Dan ethnic and religious identity in turn-of-the-millennium Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). I describe two controversies in which some Dan interpret local performance events as expressions of resistance to institutional hegemonic power structures. In our conversations, Dan individuals articulated vehement differences of opinion that demonstrate the centrality of performance to local identity negotiations with implications for the crisis of national identity politics that in 2002 contributed to the civil war that divided the country.

In the first controversy, Dan youth define their revival of the performance of *Ge* (pronounced like "gay")—an indigenous religious enactment usually involving masked dancers and music—as an enactment of anti-Islamic ideology. In direct opposition to their parents, some of whom have adopted the strict Wahhabiya form of Islam, and the many Muslims from the West African savanna who have migrated south to Man, these young Dan revive what they call "the religion of our ancestors" with *Ge* performance at its center. In discourse, these youth cite the importance of funerals, arguing that they should be conducted according to Dan custom—which includes the music and dance aspects of *Ge* performance called *Getan*—as opposed to Islamic custom, which forbids it. These youth thus explicitly link the performance of *Ge* to their expression of resistance to fundamentalist Islamic forces in their midst, forces linked with economic power and social mobility.

The second controversy centers on conflicting interpretations of the adaptation of *Getan* by local Catholic choirs. As the element of *Ge* perfor-

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mance that attracts spiritual energy to the human realm, Getan plays a vital role in the performance of Ge. Many Dan consider Ge to be the spiritual base of the cultural education taught in boys' initiation, as well as the spiritual base of the enactment of that education in the form of proper behavior for adults in Dan society. As such, for many practitioners of Dan religion, Ge, with Getan as its nucleus, is central to what it means to be Dan. That Getan is performed in the church means, for them, that the Ge spirit itself has entered the church, which they view as a kind of resistance to colonial-era missionary attempts to abolish local cultural and religious practice. For choir members themselves, however, this music, adapted with Christian lyrics, no longer attracts indigenous spirits but the Holy Spirit. Dan choir members assert that the use of this music in the church enables them to express their Christian faith in a form compatible with their identities as Dan people. In both controversies, we see contestations of Dan identity, as certain Dan Muslims and Christians dissociate their religious identities from their ethnic identities, while Ge practitioners argue that to be Dan has not just ethnic but also deeper religious implications. Ultimately this debate centers around performance, as the various agents involved cite the presence or absence of certain music and dance as key to their attempts to resist powerful forces in their lives.

Actions in both of these controversies can be interpreted as cases of performative resistance, of the expression of the power of local agents in the face of hegemony. Yet, through a consideration of Dan individuals' discourse about these two contentious issues, I argue that there is more going on than a simple binary interaction between individual resisters and a dominant hegemonic power structure. Instead, multiple power agents are at play, forming a kind of web of conflicting power relationships (Abu-Lughod 1990), and acts I am identifying as resistance are occurring within this complex web (Gilman n.d.). In this article, I engage in a "diagnostic of power" (Abu-Lughod 1990) that takes into account the full range of power interactions within which acts of resistance take place. This approach serves as a useful model to elucidate the intersecting power relationships active in diverse communities, particularly those in which conflict is at hand, and complicates the romantic notion of resistance as an exclusively triumphant anti-hegemonic phenomenon (Abu-Lughod 1990). My analysis also highlights the role of internal, local conflict, which is essential for a thorough and realistic accounting of power relations between locals and representatives of institutional structures (Ortner 1995:177). The picture that emerges is one not just of a binary interaction but of competing discourses within a dialogic space (Kaplan and Kelly 1994).

Furthermore, I explore the unintentional consequences of these performative expressions of resistance (cf. Abu-Lughod 1990). By resisting the hegemonies of Catholicism and fundamentalist Islam, my Dan consultants

unwittingly back into other hegemonies, including the institution of Ge itself, which serves as a form of local social control, as well as the dominant discourses emanating from opposing sides in the national political identity conflicts that have led to civil war and the division of the Ivorian state. In the contemporary Ivorian context marred by the politicizing of religious, regional, and ethnic difference—and in particular the vilifying of Muslims and northerners—, these local performative negotiations of religious identity have national implications. Dan people today are caught in a web of competing hegemonies, and in the context of the present political crisis, their religious choices are loaded with increasingly more weight and meaning. In this context, as in many postcolonial settings, performance and related discourse become critical arenas for identity negotiation.

Identity, Resistance, and Ge

Resistance is a familiar and important notion for many Dan, whose homeland straddles the border between Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia.¹ On the Ivorian side, the Dan were one of the last Guinea coast ethnic groups to be "pacified" by the French. Then, for decades following their subjugation by the French, Dan put up strong resistance to colonial rule and forced labor. Before the twentieth century, Dan also largely resisted both Islam and Christianity, though today many Dan identify as Christian and many are Muslim. Within Côte d'Ivoire, the Dan, more than any almost any other local ethnic group, have a national reputation as resisters to outside forces and as proud perpetrators of their unique, local culture, which is symbolized by the Dan mask, an image ubiquitous in the visual landscape of western Côte d'Ivoire.

For many Dan people, these masks exist as one part of a multifaceted concept called Ge.² Ge (plural *genu*) is most fundamentally a category of forest spirits who appear among humans as dancing and musical embodiments of Dan social ideals and beliefs (Reed 1999, 2001, 2003, 2004). (Throughout this article I will capitalize Ge to refer to the institution and concept, while the lower case ge will indicate individual spirits in performance.) Genu comprise part of a complex pantheon of spirit intermediaries between God and humans that includes ancestor spirits as well as several other categories of spirit beings.³ Most of my Dan consultants agree that genu originate in the wilderness, in certain mountains, trees, or streams. In performance, individual genu can take many forms, though most feature a masked dancer and specific music sound. Each ge manifests among humans for particular reasons, to meet particular functions. There are genu for rejoicing and entertainment, genu who direct initiation, genu who enforce fire regulations during the dry season, and genu who act as judges to settle conflicts, to cite just a few examples. But again, Ge is also held to be the spiritual base of the

experiential education taught during initiation, which includes a philosophy of social ideals and proper behavior for adults in Dan society. For this reason, many Dan who continue to practice what they often call "the tradition" or "the religion of our ancestors" assert that Ge is at the root of Dan identity.

For the practitioners of Dan religion with whom I studied, Ge does not symbolize, but *is* all aspects of its manifestation among humans—the masks, the outfits, the dances, the benedictions, the songs, the rhythms, the styles of singing and drumming—all of which are learned from *genu* in the sacred forest.⁴ And no component is more important than the music *getan*, which is the spiritual fuel that drives Ge performance. Music makes translucent the boundaries between the spiritual and human realms (cf. Friedson 1996), as performers use *getan* to attract the spirits, called *yinan*, to the human realm that are necessary to manifest ge.⁵

In the 1990s, Ge performances took place in a postcolonial context marked by increasing ethnic and religious diversification and tension. Côte d'Ivoire in the 1990s was a place in which religious, ethnic, and regional differences were becoming increasingly politicized due in part to misguided political policies that served to exacerbate historical tensions between "native" Ivorians and immigrants, between northerners and southerners, and between Muslims and Christians. Precisely these tensions led to the civil war of 2002 and the division of the country into first three and then two units, a precarious situation

Figure 1. Entertainment *genu* at a yam festival in Déoulé, Côte d'Ivoire, March 1997. Photo by the author.



which remains up to the editing of this article in summer 2005. Since Côte d'Ivoire gained independence in 1960, Catholics have held the reins of political power; in recent years, political leaders have enacted legislation, based on a xenophobic and exclusionary policy called "Ivoirité" (Ivorianness), that has disenfranchised many northerners and Muslims. Many assert that the primary purpose of Ivoirité was the exclusion of Muslim northerner Allasane Outtara from eligibility as a presidential candidate. A former Prime Minister with great popularity in the north and among northern immigrants in the south, Outtara has posed a serious potential threat to every sitting president since the death of President Félix Houphouët-Boigny in 1993.

In December 1999, the first coup in Ivorian history ended nearly forty years of political stability. Following several more coup attempts, a civil war erupted in September 2002 in which rebels seized the northern half of Côte d'Ivoire, effectively dividing the country along the lines between the historically Muslim north and historically Christian south. During this period—especially in the early days of the rebellion—Muslims and northern immigrants were repeatedly harassed and their homes burned, leaving them hiding out in mosques or fleeing for northern Côte d'Ivoire or neighboring states such as Mali and Burkina Faso from which many of them originally came. Religious affiliation today, then, indexes opposing sides in the contemporary national crisis that continues to threaten the unity and viability of the Ivorian state.⁶

The ethnographic research for this article was conducted in the 1990s, prior to the current political and military crisis, mostly in Man, the largest city (pop. ca. 100,000–125,000) in the Dan region and the capital of the *Région semi-montagneuse de l'Ouest* in western Côte d'Ivoire. At that time, Man could be characterized as a border town, between the forest and savanna (a geographical and cultural divide),⁷ and between the historically Christian south and Muslim north. Today, Man is a border town of a different sort, as it lies just north and west of the boundary separating the territory of the "New Forces"—a union of various rebel and political groups opposed to the elected government—and the territory still held by the elected government of Côte d'Ivoire. Islam has a long history in the region but has grown dramatically in the past century, in part due to the large influx of Muslims from the northern savanna who now call Man home.⁸ In great contrast to nearby regions like coastal Ghana, where Christianity has existed for five hundred years, Man was first exposed to missionary activity in the 1930s (Zinsou 1976). In the 1990s, Man was a strikingly diverse city in religious terms, with Muslims, Christians and indigenous religious practitioners at turns coexisting, cooperating, and conflicting as they moved through their daily lives. In this context, as in many situations of conflict around the world, musical performance became a critical arena for identity negotiation.

"Our Elders are 'Playing Muslim'"

Early in 1997, on a hot, dusty, dry-season day, my research assistant Biemi Gba Jacques, my wife Nicole Kousaleos, and I walked into the neighborhood of Petit Gbapleu, an old Dan village that has become completely surrounded by the growing city of Man. Several people had informed us that Petit Gbapleu was particularly active in Ge performance, and Jacques also had family connections there, so we were excited about the possibilities of conducting research in this community. After talking with several strangers we found some of Jacques' distant relatives, whom he had not seen in many years. Following handshakes, warm reintroductions, and a brief discussion of the purpose of our visit, a group of young men began proudly walking us around the neighborhood to show us the sights. First on the agenda was the Tomb Bar—the tavern built around the tomb of the founder of the village Gba Youda. They next walked us to Kun, the sacred stream. They pointed up at a mountain called the *Dent de Man* (Tooth of Man)—another sacred site for the village. In between the highlights, we chatted generally about the community. Then, at one point, we came to a stop on a dirt road. "This is the boundary," they said. "What do you mean?" we asked. "This is the boundary of our village. Julia [in Côte d'Ivoire, a general, catch-all term referring to immigrants from the northern savanna/Sahel region⁹] can live and own houses on the other side of this boundary, but not on our side." They proceeded to guide us around the perimeter of their neighborhood, at several key points emphasizing the invisible boundary so clearly important to their sense of what their community is and means. "Julia on that side," they said, "Dan over here." (Here think of the present divided map of Côte d'Ivoire.) We wondered what this was about. Why the great emphasis on this boundary during this, our first tour around the village? Eventually we came to understand that this boundary literally and metaphorically represented a form of resistance that centered around what we had come to study—Ge performance.

Dan have frequently had ambivalent relations with the northern immigrants in their midst for several reasons, principal among them economic competition (Ford 1990). In fact, as Robert Launay has shown, Islam is frequently associated with economic power in Côte d'Ivoire. Building on their long tradition as traders (jula), many northerners have become extremely successful entrepreneurs, business owners and operators. Launay argues that conversion to Islam can in fact permit one to gain access to extremely profitable trade opportunities (Launay 1992). Many of the poorer Dan with whom I have worked looked to the northerners in Man with some envy and prejudice, arguing that they elbow indigenous Dan people out of job and other economic opportunities.

Still, for several generations, many Dan have syncretically blended Islamic traditions—which have come from the north along with the northern traders—with aspects of Dan religious thought and practice. In recent years, however, syncretic religious practice has met resistance both from practitioners of Wahhabiya Islam, who demand a "pure" style of Islam divorced from local religious practice, and from a group of young adults who reject Islam and advocate what they call "the religion of our ancestors," with Ge performance at its center. These young people criticize their elders for having capitulated to the northern immigrants, their ways of life, and especially their religion. They place the blame for the abandoning of Ge, that which they argue is the nucleus of Dan identity, on their elders and the northern immigrants who have influenced them.

This revival of a performance and belief complex, defined locally as "traditional," and its framing as a rejection of Islam, serves as an interesting counterpoint to studies in the West African forest region documenting the growth of Islam and attendant decrease in indigenous religious and musical activity. In the 1970s and 1980s, for instance, Lester Monts carefully demonstrated the relationship between the growth of Islam and declining participation in Vai mask performance and secret societies. Monts shows that the decline in secret society participation led directly to a near elimination of the performance of musical genres associated with these societies (Monts 1980, 1984, 1998). In contrast, these Petit Gbapleu youth resist Islam and revive "the tradition" of Ge, including the performative genres associated with it. My research supports Peter Mark's hypothesis that movements away from Islam might be more common than has been represented in the ethnographic literature on West Africa (Mark 1992:151). Clearly, religious choice is one factor fundamental to identity for many West Africans, and in the highly pluralistic setting of contemporary West Africa these choices can lead to heated conflict along religious, generational, regional, and ethnic lines.

In 1997, Petit Gbapleu was one community in which these identity conflicts were particularly salient. Dan religious practices remained a part of the life experience of many of the Dan residents of the neighborhood. Boys and girls were circumcised and initiated at a young age. Individuals worshipped sacred mountains and springs. And many Petit Gbapleu residents worshipped *genu*. As mentioned previously, in the 1990s, Petit Gbapleu retained a reputation in the Man region for being a center of Ge performance, despite the fact that most of its renowned *genu* had been dormant for years.

In addition, the majority of Petit Gbapleu's residents identified as Muslim. The chief and all the most powerful elder men; the majority of elder, high status women; indeed, most people in their forties and older—were all Muslim. Petit Gbapleu is situated in a particularly Islamic area of the Muslim-

dominated city of Man. Bordering Petit Gbapleu is the dense and sprawling neighborhood of Julabugu—the largest and most populous neighborhood of the city, which in the 1990s was home to the majority of Man's northern immigrants. Julabugu was filled with mosques, ranging from small, single-room mosques adjacent to family compounds, to numerous storefront mosques, to the massive white "grand mosquée de Man" which dominated the city's skyline. Five times daily, calls to prayer floated through Petit Gbapleu, some originating from Julabugu, others from the mosques in Petit Gbapleu itself. Elder Gnassene Mamadou Cherif, a former traditional healer/diviner and *marabout*, had plans in 1997 to open up a Muslim mission in the neighborhood where he planned to continue working to lure people away from Dan religion and toward what he called a more "pure" form of Islam—Wahhabiya. He had taken on, as his life's mission, convincing those who remained committed to the religion of the ancestors, and those who continued to mix Islam with Dan religion, to become "true" or "simple" Muslims in the style of Wahhabiya (p.c.).¹⁰

One of the neighbors whom Gnassene wanted most to convert was Gba Gama. Gba, a young man in his thirties, refused to model himself after older members of his family and other Petit Gbapleu elders who identified as Muslim but continued to worship *genu*. In reaction to the "purer" style of Islam gaining in popularity among the elders, Gba and others rejected any and all forms of Islam. Gba Gama considered himself the leader of the informal, anti-Muslim movement in Petit Gbapleu. Gba had come from a powerful ancestral line going back to the founder of Petit Gbapleu, Gba Youda; again, it is the public shrine of his tomb around which the Tomb Bar, which Gba Gama runs, is built. Though many in Gba Gama's family, including his deceased father who had been chief of the village, had been Muslim, they had also been centrally involved in *Ge* affairs. When Gba Gama's father and many of his contemporaries died in the early 1980s, a vacuum was left in the neighborhood's practice of *Ge* and Dan religion. Since that time, many elders, led by Gnassene, who could have taken up the mantle of leadership in matters of Dan religion had instead begun leaning toward Wahhabiya, abandoning what *Ge* practitioners often call "the tradition."

One of the reasons so many younger people like Gba Gama categorically rejected Islam was that they had observed conflicts that had arisen in their grandparents' and parents' lives as a result of their syncretic blends of Islam and Dan religion. In fact it was the funeral of a female religious leader called a *zudhe* that precipitated some of the most heated conflicts in Petit Gbapleu in 1997. The *zudhe* is the elder leader of the women's *Ge* called *Kong*, a society concerned with girls' initiation and circumcision, midwifery, and spiritual consultation. The most powerful woman of any Dan community, the *zudhe* is a leader in Dan religious affairs. Yet this *zudhe*, like most

members of the *Kong* society in Petit Gbapleu, had also been Muslim. Her syncretic religious approach did not seem to pose many problems until the day she died. Then, a conflict erupted over whether her burial and funeral should be conducted according to Islamic or Dan tradition. Islamic tradition, to which the Wahhabis subscribe, stipulates a relatively brief ceremony involving Koranic chanting and recitation but no music and dance, and the nearly immediate burial of the body. Dan funerary tradition, in great contrast, spreads out over many days and centers on music and dance performance along with an extended wake over the body of the deceased. To the dismay of many in the village, the powerful Muslim elders took the *zudhe*'s body and buried her in an Islamic manner, before followers of Dan religion could react. Some young women followers of the *zudhe* were distraught by this. For example, Lien Sati Yvonne told me that the *zudhe* had been a Dan religious leader, and should have been treated that way in death. People arrived from all over the region to stay up all night watching over her body, but were unable to do so. Yvonne said that women who had been circumcised by the *zudhe* should have had the opportunity to come to her body to offer blessings. "There was not even a dance. It was taken over completely by the Muslims!" (p.c.).

All of the young women I came to know in Petit Gbapleu were ardent followers of the *zudhe* and *Kong*, and not a single one identified as Muslim. When I gathered them together for an interview one day, they told me "No one prays here. We are women of the *zu*." Seeking clarification, I mentioned that the *zudhe* herself had been Muslim (as was her successor). They responded passionately, stating that they thought it was a bad idea for the *zudhe* to be Muslim. As much as they revered the *zudhe*, they thought it better to simply rest with the intermediary of *Kong*, and not try to approach God through other intermediaries. Then, there would be no problem when you die. Religious ambiguity is not good, they said. Tiemoko Christine summed up her thoughts on the matter by stating simply, "Kong is a religion, and praying at the mosque is a religion. Following a single religion is better." I asked if they were then rejecting the religion of their mothers and grandmothers for the religion of their ancestors. They responded by stating that it's the young women of Petit Gbapleu, more so than the elders, who are "conserving the customs."

Given the importance accorded to funerals in the African context, it should come as no surprise that it was surrounding a funeral that religious conflicts in Petit Gbapleu surfaced. The case of the *zudhe* was not an isolated one. One day young drummer Goueu Tia Jean-Claude recounted to me several other examples, including the funeral of his close friend Gba Matthieu's father, who, like the *zudhe*, had been Muslim and had worshipped *Genu*:

Matthieu's father—he loved Genu! Whenever there was a little fête at his place, he invited *Gedro* [a dance ge]! But, when he died . . . Since he was an elder who loved us all, we wanted to go with the ge to his funeral. The elder Gnassene refused! He said, "This is a Muslim matter! It's not a Ge matter, it's a Muslim matter! If you want to come with your ge, wait until after the funeral is over." So, there were no genu there, and it was as if it was not *bis* funeral. (p.c.)

It was in this context of religious conflict that young people in Petit Gbapleu began resurrecting Ge performance in the late 1980s. Gba Gama began in the 1980s recruiting young people to follow "the tradition." Gba became a point man, a self-proclaimed "organizer," for many of the Genu left in the neighborhood. He began inviting young people to his bar every Saturday to practice drumming, paying for their drinks and encouraging them. Gba told me:

We, the young who are left, we began to teach our younger brothers to drum, and also, to enter into the Ge affairs so that it would not be totally forgotten . . . Now, the young try to ensure that the old attitudes continue . . . I am an organizer . . . There are some who play drums, others who dance, others who like to sing. So, it's [a] shared [effort] . . . I want, right up until I die, the customs to continue. So . . . I will not follow a religion, like the Muslim religion, where they say that "If you are within, you cannot put your hand into the affairs of Ge." (p.c.)

In 1987, when Gba Gama was busy trying to resuscitate the practice of Dan religion, a ge who had been dormant for years reappeared. Fellow Petit Gbapleu resident Semlen Aime's deceased grandmother came to him in a dream. This ancestral spirit instructed Aime that a ge in their family should be brought back to life, and that it would become very popular. So the youth of Petit Gbapleu resurrected *Gedro*, a dance or entertainment ge, and the prediction turned out to be true: from 1987 through the late 1990s, *Gedro* became one of the most popular genu in the Man region. People attended *Gedro* performances who did not necessarily worship genu. Even Gnassene Mamadou Cherif attended *Gedro* performances. Gnassene would even give gifts to the ge (a practice usually associated with "offerings" or "sacrifice"), but "That is not worship," he explained, "[Worship] is what is evil" (p.c.). For Gnassene, giving gifts in this way was no different than what one would do during any secular performance of West African music, in which audience members offer monetary gifts to performers at peak moments as a matter of course. Many people considered dance ge performances as purely secular entertainment. Some Muslims and Christians felt they could attend *Gedro* performances without compromising their religious values. And yet, for the young performers, this was an explicitly religious revival, and an equally explicit enactment of an anti-Wahhabi position.

This sentiment was well articulated by the master drummer for *Gedro*

performances, Goueu Tia Jean-Claude. Of the Wahhabis, Goueu derisively asserted:

It's our parents, who have come into the city, who *play* Muslim. It's our parents who do not understand. It's they who have become, how do you call it—Wahhabiya—who *play* Muslim . . . Petit Gbapleu is a very dangerous case. A very dangerous case. Why do I say that? Because our parents in Petit Gbapleu have followed foreigners living in Petit Gbapleu, and they now want to abandon their customs. (p.c.)

Goueu's strong words—accusing his elders of merely *playing* Muslim—underscored the intensity of the generational religious disjuncture in Petit Gbapleu in 1997. Zoe Strother writes that Pende mask performances "build and cement communities" (1998:16). Clearly, Petit Gbapleu residents created both community as well as conflict through their religious practices, including Ge performance, which some view as a form of resistance to Wahhabiya. Identity is always formed in relationship to others; identity is *negotiated* (Bauman 1971). Goueu expressed his own values and identity in direct opposition—in resistance—to the actions of others in his community, and Ge was at the center of this debate.

In this context of multiple religious orientations, people tend to religiously distinguish themselves from one another based less on dogma and more on *action*. On this point, my research supports what Robert Launay observed in northern Côte d'Ivoire. Launay states, "The ideas of one's opponents are simply ignorant or silly; their behavior, on the other hand, is objectionable, if not frankly evil" (1992:105). Likewise, it is behavior such as the inclusion or exclusion of music and dance in a funeral, rather than the ideas of others, that my consultants routinely cited as factors in differentiating Dan religious identities. This sort of factor is what made public performances of Ge—enactments of religious resistance—so important in terms of the negotiation of identity in the diverse social climate of 1990s Man.

"The Ge is in the Church"

Let me begin my discussion of this second controversy by introducing two individuals: Biemi Gba Jacques and Gueu Gbe Alphonse. Biemi Gba Jacques, who in 1997 was twenty-three years of age, grew up mostly in the major city of Abidjan, though he also had spent much of his youth in his home village near Man where he was instructed in Ge initiation. Like many young West Africans, Biemi considered himself both worldly and deeply connected to traditional roots. Biemi identified primarily as Catholic, though he also believed deeply in Ge and its importance to Dan identity; acting as my research assistant, Biemi argued, enabled him to deepen his connection to Ge and his identity as a Dan person. Monsieur Gueu Gbe Alphonse was an

elder, retired from his position working for the National Office of Tourism. Like Biemi, Gueu Gbe held strong opinions about the importance of Ge to Dan religious and ethnic identity. Renowned locally for his cultural acumen, Gueu Gbe was one of my primary consultants.

One day, Biemi and I sat with Gueu Gbe, discussing the competition between various religions that characterized 1990s Man. Gueu Gbe, who was old enough to remember the early days of Christianity in the region, recalled that early missionaries demanded that converts renounce everything associated with Dan religion and culture. Over time, Gueu Gbe continued, church organizers recognized the need to permit some aspects of local culture—language, dress, dance, music—in church services. This trend was common in Africa, as in many parts of the continent, Africans “Africanized” Christianity by creating their own independent churches, incorporating music and even in many cases certain beliefs from local culture into their Sunday services (cf. Omoyajowo 1982; Peel 1968). Many European- and American-led churches, suffering from declining numbers in their congregations, then began permitting elements of local culture in their services in order to compete for followers.

In Man, this trend led to the creation of indigenous choirs in the Catholic Church. In the Man vicinity, both Dan and Wè (Dan ethnic neighbors to the south) choirs sing indigenous music, using indigenous instruments, with Christian-oriented lyrics. Gueu Gbe explained that permitting this was a wise move by the Catholics, as it enabled Dan people to be Christian yet retain a sense of their own cultural identity. He reasoned, “If we don’t have the drums in the church, people will leave the church and return to the villages, to the masks” (p.c.). I found this all interesting, if not unusual. But my ears really perked up as Gueu Gbe continued: “They have sent our Mask songs to the church, and they call that, ‘Choir’ . . . They add ‘Jesus,’ ‘Father,’ [or] ‘Savior,’ but the refrain, the melody, the drums—it’s the same thing!” He went on to assert that this showed the power of Ge. Christianity could not survive in Dan country without transferring power from Ge. Since the rhythms, the manner of singing and drumming, indeed, in some cases, even the *very songs themselves* that are taught by genu in initiation and are themselves considered to be a part of the manifestation of Ge are being sung in the church, that means that *Ge is in the church*.

Enter a third individual: Dan choir leader and hymn composer Loua Philippe. Loua, a rural, middle-aged man who spent his youth practicing Dan religion, represented himself in 1997 as exclusively Catholic and expressed no interest in Dan religion. Hymn composer Loua had a very different interpretation of the use of Getan in the church. Loua explained his creative process to me. He takes traditional Dan songs, changes the words to make reference to his Christian faith, and then teaches them to his choir, who sing

the songs to the accompaniment of a Dan drum ensemble. Particularly effective, Loua told me, are songs that already have religious associations—Getan, or Ge songs—the songs which are for Ge performers the sonic aspect of the manifestation of Ge. Below is the text of a song I heard his choir perform at a baptism, and that I later heard sung in its original form:

ORIGINAL GETAN:

<i>Gewon ye dhoë</i>	The affair (matter) of Ge exists
<i>mengban waa wondo Gewon</i>	Not everyone knows that the affair
<i>ye dhoë</i>	(matter) of Ge exists

CATHOLIC CHOIR VERSION:

<i>Zlan ye dhoë</i>	God exists
<i>mengban waa wondo Zlan ye dhoë</i>	Not everyone knows that God exists

In this typical example, Loua simply substitutes, “*Zlan*” or “*God*” for “*Gewon*,” a word that literally translates as “affair of the Ge,” but refers to the whole system, concept, and institution of Ge. According to Loua Philippe, his use of Getan as original source material does not indicate that he has invited Ge into the church. Changing the words, he says, changes the meaning.¹¹ The songs no longer attract the yinan spirits. Rather, in the church, when his choir members sing, they become animated by the Holy Spirit (p.c.). For Loua, the style of singing and drumming, and the melodies, are not a part of Ge. For him, they have taken on a new meaning. For Ge practitioners, Ge performance reinforces both ethnic and religious identity; Loua dissociates the religious from the ethnic aspects of this complex identity.

Biemi Gba Jacques is one person who disagrees with Loua Philippe. For Biemi, Ge is a spirit, all aspects of that spirit’s manifestation on earth, an education, and a manner of behavior—to the extent that when Getan is played in the church, Ge is in the church. Ge is something that is deeper than affiliation with another religion; it is the theory and action that some call “the tradition,” a concept at the base of a notion of religious and ethnic identity that cannot be dissociated. Biemi himself articulates as well as anyone could the connection that some Dan feel between their music, their culture, their identity, and the source of it all, Ge, which Biemi here calls “Mask.”¹² Discussing the use of Ge music, or Getan, in the church, Biemi said:

If the rhythms which were taught by the mask [Ge], under those circumstances, if the songs which were taught—because it’s the *same* refrain—if it’s those songs, if the drum that was created to manifest the victory of a mask, to manifest the glory of a mask, to glorify a mask in song, if all that is found in the church, I say that it’s the Mask [Ge] that’s in the church . . . If the accoutrements, that’s to say the clothes that we wear to accompany a mask are found in the church, I say that the Mask is in the church. What they didn’t want! And that’s what they don’t know . . . We [Jacques and the author] will go to the church, and we will

listen . . . You will see that it's the same thing! The difference is that it's "Mask" that is sung, and the other it's "God" that is sung . . . That will be palpable proof that the Mask is in the church! . . . All that comes from the Mask school. Even if a mask doesn't go to dance in the church. But what they [the Genu] have taught, we find in the church. And that also is the Mask! They [the Christians] think that the Mask is he who accompanies a mask with a face covering. But no! That's what they don't understand! That's what they don't know! They don't know that the Mask—it's an education. The Mask, it's a comportment. The Mask, is the clothing. The Mask is the manner of speaking. The manner of singing. In short, the Mask is life. The manner of living that they [the elders and the Genu] inculcate in a person. That they teach someone. That's what the missionaries didn't know at first . . . the Mask has its metaphysical manifestation that has entered into the mentality of people, in the people's manner of thinking, in peoples' manner of living! In short, in the sociocultural comportment of the people. (p.c.)

Clearly, that the melodies, rhythms, and instruments of Getan—themselves manifestations of Ge—are now used in Catholic worship services represents to Biemi a triumph of Ge, and Dan culture, over French colonial attempts to abolish local cultural practice and belief. Though he himself does not use the word, Biemi's assessment represents a classic case of performative resistance, of the expression of the power of local agents in the face of hegemony.

Conclusion: A Diagnostic of Power

Where there is power, there is resistance (Michel Foucault,
The History of Sexuality)

Where there is resistance, there is power (Lila Abu-Lughod)

Applying a diagnostic of power analysis to the two controversies described in this article complicates the expressions of resistance found therein. This approach highlights not just the agency of the resisters in speaking out against hegemony, it also reveals ways in which these resisters might be playing into the hands of the hegemonic powers being resisted, while inadvertently backing into still other hegemonic traps. A diagnostic of power thus shines hard light upon the power relationships behind acts of resistance scenes in complex, heterogeneous contexts such as 1990s Côte d'Ivoire.

Let me first subject the second controversy to a diagnostic of power analysis. While it is clearly true that for Biemi that Ge, and by extension Dan people, has resisted missionary attempts to wipe out local cultural practice, what other power dynamics are at play? In resisting the hegemony of the Church, what other hegemonies might Biemi and his fellow Ge practitioners be unwittingly backing into? In my introduction, I stressed the identity-generating aspects of Ge. But Ge performance is not solely a vehicle for the negotiation of identity and self-determination in resistance to colonial and postcolonial national power bases. It is far more than that. Ge also has a clear

historical role as a means of local social control. Ge in performance defines and reinforces Dan patriarchy, for example, providing a deep spiritual rationale for male control and domination of females and for customs such as female circumcision.¹³ Ge also provides a religious base for local political power. In many Dan communities, chiefs can rule only with the behind-the-scenes consent of the most powerful Ge, which is the province just of one revered and yet feared family that exerts a great deal of control over local affairs. Some Dan who reject Ge do so because they feel limited and trapped by "the tradition." And dissenters can be pursued and attacked by Ge practitioners; in fact, it is frequently prominent Christians such as choir leader Loua Philippe who are victimized by such attacks. For Loua, then, if singing Getan in the Church is an act of resistance, it is not resistance to Christianity and its colonial and postcolonial power associations; rather, Loua sings his resistance to the confining social order of Ge. But, following Ron Emoff, I would argue that, for Loua, singing his compositions is not *primarily* resistance of any kind; Loua told me that he sings in the church simply "to worship God." Similarly, Emoff notes Veit Erlmann's *Nightsong* (1996), in which Joseph Shabalala of Ladysmith Black Mambazo speaks of "a power which rises above us all" (Emoff 2002:151). Interpreting such expressions of faith as mere acts of resistance related to human power struggles would be reductionist and would do a disservice to people whose own interpretations sometimes refer to powers that transcend the human realm (cf. Gilman n.d.).¹⁴

If I might feel that I am forcing an interpretation of resistance onto choir leader Loua, in the case of Biemi Gba Jacques, resistance is clearly *his* interpretation of the performance of Getan in the Church. Yet, to continue the diagnostic of power analysis, while Jacques might celebrate the fact that Getan is sung in the church, his expression of verbal resistance does little to challenge or subvert Church authority (cf. Gilman n.d.; Abu-Lughod 1990:41; Kaplan and Kelly 1994:126; Scott 1986:6); the Church is strong and has gained and retained many Dan adherents through the musical/cultural appropriation of Getan. If the singing of Getan in the Church can be interpreted as an instance of the power of individual, or local, agency in the face of hegemony, then it is no less an appropriation by the Church to gain more adherents. No one "wins," as this is resistance, at least from some Dan peoples' perspectives, *and* the power of the Church is reinforced because the participants—including Biemi Gba Jacques, interestingly enough—are converting to Catholicism, even if they are singing Dan music in mass.

The separation of ethnic and religious identities is relatively new for Dan people and is particularly salient for Christians like Loua Philippe who want to express their Christian faith in a manner that feels compatible with their ethnic identities. Meanwhile, for Ge practitioners such as Biemi Gba Jacques and Gueu Gbe Alphonse, Dan identity remains inherently both an ethnic and

a religious positioning that draws on the trope of the Dan's national reputation as proud resisters to outside forces. Biemi's position on this issue is particularly interesting and complex, given that he is both a practitioner of Ge and a Catholic. Like Loua, Biemi proclaims a strong Dan ethnic identity as well as an identity as a Catholic. At the same time, at this point in his life, as he turns particular attention to Ge and deepens his sense of self as a Dan person, Biemi also chooses to include a vehement articulation of resistance to historical attempts to oppress Ge as part of his expression of identity. These differing opinions of what it means to be Dan in the context of turn-of-the-century, pluralizing, and conflict-ridden Côte d'Ivoire were negotiated through discourse on musical choice and performance.

Like choir leader Loua, Dan Wahhabis in Petit Gbapleu also expressed identities which dissociate religion from ethnicity, to a large extent based on their opposition to Dan religious practice, including the performance of Ge. And the youth spearheading the Ge revival forcefully rejected this positioning, asserting Ge to be central to what it means to be Dan. Yet, by resisting what they see as the hegemony of Wahhabiya, could Petit Gbapleu youth also have been unwittingly backing up into the hegemony of Ge as a form of local social control? Consider the young women involved. On one hand, locally, Kong does offer some limited access to power, particularly for the *zudhe*, who, as the most powerful woman of any Dan community, is often consulted by elder male leaders when making major decisions that impact the community. And Kong does offer some of its initiates power over women's affairs, including initiation, childbirth, and circumcision. Yet the Kong society is clearly a hegemonic force in and of itself. Young Dan women absolutely must be circumcised and initiated to be considered socially acceptable and marriageable in any traditional Dan community. Many Dan women who live in Abidjan resist these ritual markers of Dan identity, and some in fact are involved in the national movement advocating the enforcement of the law, on the books in Côte d'Ivoire, which makes the practice of female circumcision illegal. For his part, elder Wahhabi leader Gnassene argued that Ge was nothing more than a means for elder males to flaunt and reinforce their power. When elders demand that a sacrifice must be made to an ancestor or a *ge*, then women must comply by preparing huge feasts of food and drink that the elders themselves actually consume. Gnassene, then, resists the local authority of Ge and aligns himself with the remote, distant authority of fundamentalist Islam, in particular Wahhabi leaders from Saudi Arabia who occasionally visit Petit Gbapleu, staying in Gnassene's mosque (p.c.). Yet again, despite Gnassene's own linkage of his decision to become Wahhabi to his hegemonic view of Ge, interpreting his religious orientation exclusively to

an act of resistance would simplify a complex positioning that surely has much to do with faith and other factors.

The youthful performance revivalists themselves viewed Ge in exclusively positive terms for many reasons, including the fact that embracing Ge performance had enabled some, such as master drummer Goueu Tia Jean-Claude, to earn much-needed cash. If, following Launay (1992), conversion to Islam can open up business opportunities and thus could be seen as a means for advancement, then Goueu showed that Ge can do the same. If Goueu was excluded from Muslim-dominated business opportunities as a result of resisting Islam, drumming had offered him an alternative means of gaining access to resources. Economic empowerment is thus one additional factor in the second controversy, and Ge performance for some serves as a means of resistance to an economic system that places impoverished Dan youth in the small city of Man at a significant disadvantage.

But the primary motivation that Petit Gbapleu youth performers cited for embracing Ge was identity-centered: their desire to revive the religion of the ancestors in opposition to their elders, northern immigrants, and Wahhabiya Islam. While these youth engaged in local identity politics through Ge performance, anti-Muslim and anti-northern sentiments have become explosive political issues at the national level. In the current Ivorian political crisis, the politicizing of religious, regional, and ethnic difference has resulted in political disenfranchisement, violence, and ultimately, a civil war. In the north and the south, Muslims and non-Muslims have fought in the streets. The United Nations has documented at least one case in which the elected regime of President Laurent Gbagbo clearly backed the systematic oppression and killing of Muslims and northern immigrants attempting a peaceful protest in the main city of Abidjan (BBC 2004). As for Biemi, it was unclear whether Petit Gbapleu youth actually succeeded in subverting the authority of their elders and northern immigrants through their performative resistance. But did their local expression of anti-Islamic ideology impact a broader national discourse?

The darker side to this situation is certainly the implications of religious choice in today's national political identity crisis in Côte d'Ivoire. Because of the instability of the country, I have been unable to return to continue to explore these issues now that, in a border community like Man, Christianity and Islam are linked not just to regions and ethnic groups but to opposing sides in a war. I am thus left with speculation and unknowns. While conversion is a complex topic with many factors contributing to individual choices—not the least of which is faith—, adopting a Christian identity also carries the association of the south, the elected Ivorian government, and Western-leaning cultural, economic, and political choices. Islam connotes

resistance to Western power but even more so, today, resistance to the elected government of the south, as the majority of the rebel New Forces who control the northern half of the country are Muslim.

Clearly there is a national context for the local conflicts that are being played out through Ge performance. How are young Ge performers responding to increasing tensions on the national level between north and south, Muslim and non-Muslim? By linking performance of Ge to an anti-Muslim cultural revival, are Petit Gbapleu youth aligning themselves with the xenophobic hegemony of the Ivorian state? Do Christians such as Loua, now living in a rebel-controlled zone, feel greater affinity with the government-held territory to the south than with their own local community? In the context of the politicization of religious, regional, and ethnic difference, life for today's Dan is complex in that so many are choosing to honor non-local authority. How does a young Dan person make decisions? By obeying the rules of the Vatican while resisting the authority of the elders and Ge? By resisting Wahhabiya and adopting Ge? Ge has been historically, and continues to be for some today, a means of resisting both Christianity and Islam, and all the complex meanings attached to each. Ge itself, however, is not only central to Dan identity but also a form of social control. Dan people today are caught in a web of competing hegemonies, and some Dan position themselves in relation to these hegemonies through their discourse about music and dance. As Abu-Lughod (1990) has stated, "Where there is resistance, there is power," and analyzing resistance through a diagnostic of power is a useful model for revealing intersecting and conflicting power structures in diversifying communities. In the Ivorian context of increasing ethnic and religious diversity and conflict, music performance, as a public enactment of religious and ethnic identity, is central to local identity negotiations with national implications.

Notes

1. Dan are historically farmers, and many continue agricultural practices today. Some participate in agriculture as business, growing coffee, cacao, rice, and other crops for sale, while subsistence farming also remains common. Many Dan today, however, live in cities in the Dan region such as Man and Danane and work in the service economy, selling goods in urban markets or working in local businesses. A large Dan population also lives in the south of Côte d'Ivoire, working on plantations or carving out an urban existence in Abidjan. No recent census figures on Dan population are available, though the most recent estimate of 350,000 is surely low.

2. A healthy body of scholarly literature exists on Ge, most of it written by art historians and anthropologists. See, for example, Fischer 1978; Fischer and Himmelheber 1984; Gba 1982, 1984; Harley [1950] 1968; Himmelheber 1965; Majima 1997; Tabmen 1971; Vandenhouste [1952] 1989; Zemp [1969] 1993, 1971.

3. For a detailed discussion of the concept of Ge, including its relationship to other Dan spirits, see Chapter 4, "What is Ge?" in *Dan Ge Performance* (Reed 2003).

4. Though Ge (or *Gle*, among the western and southern Dan) has generally been translated in scholarly literature as "mask," some of my consultants argued that this is an insufficient and inaccurate translation. That is, Ge is a multifaceted, complex phenomenon, one element of which is its physical manifestation in performance. Many (though not all) Ge performances involve a masked dancer, who wears a *Gewoedboe* (literally, face of the Ge, or "mask") as he performs.

5. Many Dan recognize a variety of types of spirit intermediaries between humans and God (*Zlan*). Yinan and ge are just two of these different types of spirit intermediaries. For more on types of spirits in the Dan religious system, and ways people communicate with and through these spirits, see page 72ff in Reed 2003.

6. For a concise recent summary of the ethnic, religious, and regional conflicts at the base of the Ivorian political crisis, see James Copnall 2004.

7. The forest region of Côte d'Ivoire is home to many Kru- and Akan-speaking peoples, while the savanna in the north finds a majority of northerners speak either Senoufo or Julia, a northern Mande language closely related to the national language of Mali (Bambara or Bamanankan) and the language spoken in northeast Guinea (Malinké or Maninkakan). Though many northerners also live in the south, there remain substantial cultural differences between the northern and southern regions of the country.

8. Many northerners followed trade routes that had been opened up to them following the "pacification" by the French colonial army invasion to set up settlements and trading outposts in towns and villages in the forest region of what is now Côte d'Ivoire (Person 1982). One such settlement was in the city of Man, which saw a steady increase in northern immigrants throughout the twentieth century, most of whom are Muslim.

9. This designation, "Julia" is rather complex. The word "jula" means "trader" in northern Mande languages like Julia, Bamanankan (Bambara) and Maninkakan (Malinké). Generally speaking, all immigrants, many of them merchants, from the savanna and Sahel who have settled in central and southern Côte d'Ivoire are identified by others as "Julia." A small percentage of them actually come from the Julia ethnic region in north-central Côte d'Ivoire and southern Burkina Faso, but many belong to other ethnic groups. Yet, in part due to their dress (generally *bubus* associated with Islam), they are automatically associated with Islam and the north and called "Julia." To further complicate the matter, even converts to Islam who are from the forest region sometimes identify themselves, and are identified by others, as "Julia." This is true of many Dan Muslims in Man. For excellent discussions of the complexities of "Julia" identity in Côte d'Ivoire, see Launay 1982 and 1992. Simply put, when discussing the hundreds of thousands of various northern peoples of myriad nationalities and ethnicities living in southern Côte d'Ivoire, northerner=Julia=Muslim.

10. All interviews used for this article were recorded and the originals have been deposited in the Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music.

11. Loua's assertion that recontextualizing this piece of music alters its meaning brings to mind recent ethnomusicological literature probing the extent to which music can carry the baggage of extra-musical associations with it. Peter Manuel devotes an entire chapter of *Cassette Culture* to the issue of recycling melodies in India (Manuel 1993:131-52). Jeffrey Summit, in *The Lord's Song in a Strange Land*, explores debates over the appropriateness of the use of non-Jewish melodies in the songs of Jewish worship services (Summit 2000). Martin Daughtry (2003:59), in his investigation of the identity debates surrounding Vladimir Putin's legislation replacing the melody of the Russian national anthem with that of a Soviet-era national anthem, draws upon Boris Asaf'ev to assert that while new "intonations" of a melody cause a shift in meaning, something of the original meaning is always retained. Clearly re-use, re-contextualizing and appropriation of music can lead to ideological debate that often demonstrates the centrality of music to identity negotiation.

12. While many of my consultants prefer that I use "Ge" as opposed to "Mask" in my publications, in interviews conducted in French these same consultants sometimes used "Masque" to refer to "Ge." In such cases, including this passage from Biemi Gba Jacques, the word "Mask"

thus appears, despite the fact that it is not an accurate translation of the complex, multifaceted word "Ge."

13. While the practice of female circumcision by Dan can certainly be argued to be a reinforcement of Dan patriarchy, it is in fact more complex than that. As in many parts of Africa, it is elder Dan women who are some of the most ardent defenders of the practice of female circumcision. Many Dan argue that female (and male) circumcision is a critical, bodily marker of Dan identity.

14. Gilman offers yet another critical corrective to the tendencies of scholars of resistance. As she notes, we must dissociate agency from resistance, in that, faced with hegemonic power, there are numerous possible responses—not just acts of resistance—that demonstrate agency. Gilman notes that a person who recognizes power imbalance but chooses not to act is as much an agent as someone who engages in acts of resistance (Gilman n.d.).

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